



Study Guide

The Dancing Story Lady
presents
The Laughing River

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Artistic Genres: Dance, Stories, Music and More
Performing Artist: Deborah Adero Ferguson

Alabama Touring Artist Program

presented by the Alabama State Council on the Arts

This Study Guide has been prepared for you by the Alabama State Council on the Arts in collaboration with the performing artist. Much of the vocabulary that is arts related is taken directly from the Alabama Course of Study, Arts Education. With an understanding that each teacher is limited to the amount of time that may be delegated to new ideas and subjects, this guide is both brief and designed in a way that we hope supports your school curriculum. We welcome feedback and questions, and will offer additional consulting on possible curriculum connections and unit designs should you desire this support. Please feel free to request further assistance and offer your questions and feedback. Hearing from educators helps to improve our programs for other schools and educators in the future.

Please Contact:

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Set up:

Artists typically arrive 60 minutes before their scheduled performance in order to set up. Please have the space available to the artist as soon as she arrives.

All artists will need some kind of setup prior to arrival. Please communicate with the artist to discuss needs. Before arrival, please make sure floors are clean, and any electrical hook ups are in place for the artist. If she has asked to use your amplification system, please have it ready for a sound test as soon as the artist arrives. Please provide a staff person to assist the artist with set up.

Role of the Audience:

Although many students may not choose to pursue professional careers in the arts, many will choose to remain lifelong participants in, and learners of, the arts. A role that all students may play is that of an appreciative, responsive audience member. This role is one that has lifelong value to the learner as well as to the performer. Learning appropriate audience behavior is an integral component of all of the arts education areas. Positive audience qualities are part of the overall goal of *Achieving Excellence Through Arts Literacy*.

- Alabama Course of Study: Arts Education;
2006

What your students should know:

Appropriate audience behavior includes sitting still and being very quiet during the performance. Audiences clap at the end of particular sections of the performance, or when they see something amazing that they want to tell the performer they really like. If a performer takes a bow, that is always a time to clap. You should not clap to music unless the performer asks you to clap. It is never appropriate to talk during a performance, unless in this instance the artist asks a question. We ask teachers and students to practice these rules of performance etiquette during the Alabama Touring Program productions.

What to expect:

The Dancing Story Lady will perform a 50 minute interactive show which includes storytelling, singing and dancing. Students and teachers will be asked to participate by snapping their fingers and clapping their hands while singing call and response songs. They will also be invited to stand and participate in a group line dance, and some teachers will be chosen to play instruments with the artist during the dance. The line dance will consist of full body movements. Teachers are encouraged to push students in wheel chairs or assist students with limited motor skills. During another participatory activity in the performance students will learn some sign language and creative dramatics movements using their hands, arms and upper torso but will not have to get out of their seats. Once the performance is over there will be a 10 minute talkback with the Dancing Story Lady and students. Students will be asked to raise their hands and speak loudly so that everyone will hear them.

**Historical Background:**

Dance, music and storytelling are all an integral part of the cultures found within the 52 countries of Africa. Dance is used in the African culture as an extension of daily living and both dance and music are used in the classrooms to teach regional history and in the community to reinforce the culture of particular ethnic groups (or tribes) of people. The use of storytelling is often a tool used by the *griot* (teacher and chieftain advisor) to chastise (unethical) leaders. Stories are also told by the elders to instill community values, correct behavior and teach children life lessons, teach history and educate on community traditions and stories are used to explain animal behavior and natural world creation.

Websites you might visit:

1. www.gateway-african.com/stories
2. www.americanfolklore.net/folklore/africanamerican-folklore
3. www.video.nationalgeographic.com/video/exploreorg/ghana-drum-dance-eorg
4. www.dance.lovetoknow.com/History_of_African_Dance
5. www.orrt.org/teachers/chapbook.html

Curriculum Connections:

- Following directions: Follow one and two part oral instructions.
- Perform folk dances from various cultures. (dance standard)
- Heighten kinesthetic awareness in performing movement skills. (dance standard)
- Communicate personal feelings and ideas through dance sequence. (dance standard)
- Enhance communication of personal ideas and experiences by participating in a dance using another art form as the motivator (dance standard)
- Engage in movement problem-solving dance experiences (dance standard)

West African Rhythm Instruments

Djembe - a goblet-shaped West African drum carved from a single tree section, usually made with a goatskin head held on and tuned with rope.



Shekere (pronounced shakaray) - a shaker made of a dried gourd covered with a woven net of beads and seeds, played by shaking or by striking against the hand.



Vocabulary:

- Dance: a series of rhythmic and patterned bodily movements usually performed to music
- Instruments: devices used to create music
- Africa: second largest continent
- Griot: teacher and storyteller
- Funga: welcome dance of the Yoruba and Ibo people of Nigeria
- culture: the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group
- story: a fictional narrative, shorter than a novel that has five parts (prologue, beginning, middle, end, epilogue) and may include cultural myths and folklore that enhance the plot.
- agrarian: a culture based on farming; a society with a developed way of life that includes agricultural behaviors and habits. An economy based on agriculture.
- moral: a lesson, especially one concerning what is right or prudent, that can be derived from a story, a piece of information, or an experience.

Facts to enhance student learning (to share before the performance):

1. Dance is made up of particular movements that allow the body to travel in different directions and this requires dancers to always be acutely aware of their personal and group space. Students should be conscious and aware of personal space as they are directed to move to the left and right using their arms and hands. The participatory part of the show will call for students to respect each other's individual space, listen carefully to the directions, watch the movements demonstrated by the Dancing Story Lady and attempt to the best of their ability to replicate the movement.
2. Traditional African dance is always accompanied by a song. The songs' meaning will be reflected in the movements of the dance and this makes the dance portray certain ideas. During the Dancing Story Lady performance students will be taught a song that will be used during the group dance. It will be important that students remember the words of the song taught prior to the dance and listen carefully to the pronunciation of the unfamiliar words and try to the best of their ability to sing the correct words.

3. Historically, some traditional African dances are a core component of a story, folktale, legend or myth. Students should pay attention to the story ***Laughing River*** and anticipate where a dance (or dances) might occur in a traditional village setting.
4. Storytellers are also actors who improvise. Each time a storyteller tells a story something different is added or improvised based upon the audience reaction. Each character that is introduced has a different voice and speaks with a different level of emotional intensity created from the imagination of the storyteller. The ability to portray a variety of characters and present them in interesting and entertaining ways is one of the hallmarks of a good storyteller.
5. Each story, however, has a particular lesson, or moral, that will impact the audience in a positive way. Sometimes a storyteller plans to tell one particular story, but the audience energy or behavior may require another story - another lesson. The ability to adapt to the audience needs and present a well-crafted story that teaches a needed lesson helps develop the skill of a storyteller. The lesson is presented through the use of certain words and phrases, often repeated throughout the story. Listen for particular words or clues that illustrate the lesson. What lesson(s) are presented in the Dancing Story Lady presentation?

Suggested Activities to do before the performance:

1. Introduce the subject of bullying and begin a discussion about it. Have students identify a bully's behavior and things that bullies often do. Invite students to share an experience with bullying: either personally experienced or observed. Have students brainstorm possible reasons why a person might become a bully, and what might be done to change the person's behavior.
2. Explore the way dance is used in our 21st Century Western society. Share the information that Native American and African cultures, and other Third World countries, have for centuries utilized dance not only for performance, but also as an extension of daily life. Introduce the word agrarian (or farming) and that many African cultures are agrarian. Have students explore ways that dance could be used in an agrarian culture. Let them brainstorm the answers to these questions: What might be the purpose of the dance? When might it be performed? Where might it be performed? Who would perform it? What would the movements look like?

3. Explore the word “moral” in the context of a folktale or story. Read several Anansi the Spider stories or other folktales and have students identify the moral. Ask students to imagine the folktale(s) as a current movie and describe what they or it might look and sound like using examples of language and situations from their own lives.

Suggested activities to do after the performance:

1. Explain to students that, when the sun is too hot or the earth is too dry in the tradition of African and Native American peoples, it is time to shake with a Rain Dance. Inform them that they will be making an Ugandan-style Rain Stick which they will use to create music and dance. Each student will need a cardboard tube, buttons, small beads or beans, stapler, paint and paintbrush. Have students staple one end of the tube closed and partially fill it with buttons, beads, rice or small objects that will make a drizzling water sound when shaken. Staple the other end closed, paint the outside and let it dry. Break students into five groups and have each group create movements that invite the sky to send forth water. This is called *choreography*. Let each group use their Rain Sticks for music and perform their dance for each other. Have students describe and identify the movements of each group and tell what is good or effective in the movement and explain why. Remind each group that when they are not performing they have the role of audience and each person should practice being a good audience member.
2. Explain to students that in a story a bully is called an antagonist and the hero who defeats the bully is called a protagonist. Read a story or folktale that features a bully as the antagonist who is defeated or won over by the protagonist. Have students identify the main ideas and characters and the sequence of events in the story. Divide students into several groups. Let the students create a new story by placing the main ideas, characters and sequence of events (beginning, middle, and end for K-3 - older students add a prologue and epilogue) into a contemporary setting in their community. Let one student be the narrator and have the other students recreate the story substituting movement for words. Have students identify the effective movements in the story and explain why.

3. Have 4th grade and higher students use their movement stories created in #2 and as a group create a written sequential story using some of the vocabulary words they are currently studying. Encourage students to create an intriguing title to go with the stories. Have students type their stories into a chapbook format. (*See listed websites*).

Allow K-3 students to draw their stories in a sequential order and staple them together in a comic book format. The books can be displayed in the classroom library or the school library to be shared with the student body.

Reflective Questions to explore with students:

1. What situations create a bully?
2. How can a bully change their behavior?
3. Should bullies be ignored? Why or why not?
4. Why was peace so important in the story *The Laughing River*?
5. Is peace important in real life? Why or why not?
6. How does a storyteller bring a story to life?
7. How did you use your imagination while watching this performance?

ARTIST BIO

Deborah Adero Ferguson

The Dancing Story Lady, is a native of Chicago, Illinois, and a professional actress, dancer, storyteller and arts educator with over thirty years of experience in the performing arts. She has studied traditional dance, storytelling and music in the African countries of Kenya, Senegal, Gambia and the Ivory Coast through grants awarded by the National Endowment for the Arts. She has performed at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the Smithsonian Museums in Washington, D.C.; the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee; the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia; the National Black Storytelling Festivals and at schools, universities, theatres and festivals nationwide. She is also a writer and playwright and has received numerous writing awards and her poetry, and short stories have been published nationally.

An arts educator for three decades, Deborah Ferguson has worked nationally with students of all ages and abilities through arts in education programs funded by state arts councils. She has an impressive track record as a trainer in developing arts-based and arts-integrated curriculums. She is a former field advisor and faculty member of the Mississippi Arts Commission's Whole Schools Summer Institute and is a collaborating and touring artist for the Alabama State Council on the Arts.

Deborah Adero Ferguson holds a Bachelors Degree in Interdisciplinary Studies and Masters Degree in English: Creative Writing from the University of South Alabama. She is currently an adjunct professor in the English Department at the University of South Alabama. A grandmother, she lives with her husband, Joseph, in Foley, Alabama.

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DANCE A STORY:

The Laughing River

African Dance and Storytelling